



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Myth and the Monster of Intersex : Narrative Strategies of Otherness in XXY (Lucía Puenzo, Argentina, 2007)

Citation for published version:

Gleghorn, C 2011, Myth and the Monster of Intersex : Narrative Strategies of Otherness in XXY (Lucía Puenzo, Argentina, 2007). in N Bermúdez Barrios (ed.), *Latin American Cinemas: Local Views and Transnational Connections*. University of Calgary Press, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, pp. 149-174.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Latin American Cinemas: Local Views and Transnational Connections

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN SERIES

Christon I. Archer, General Editor

ISSN 1498 -2366

This series sheds light on historical and cultural topics in Latin America and the Caribbean by publishing works that challenge the canon in history, literature, and postcolonial studies. It seeks to print cutting-edge studies and research that redefine our understanding of historical and current issues in Latin America and the Caribbean.

- No. 1 • **Waking the Dictator: Veracruz, the Struggle for Federalism and the Mexican Revolution** Karl B. Koth
- No. 2 • **The Spirit of Hidalgo: The Mexican Revolution in Coahuila** Suzanne B. Pasztor • Copublished with Michigan State University Press
- No. 3 • **Clerical Ideology in a Revolutionary Age: The Guadalajara Church and the Idea of the Mexican Nation, 1788-1853** Brian F. Connaughton, translated by Mark Allan Healey • Copublished with University Press of Colorado
- No. 4 • **Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City, 1876-1910** Claudia Agostoni • Copublished with University Press of Colorado
- No. 5 • **Madness in Buenos Aires: Patients, Psychiatrists and the Argentine State, 1880-1983** Jonathan Ablard • Copublished with Ohio University Press
- No. 6 • **Patrons, Partisans, and Palace Intrigues: The Court Society of Colonial Mexico, 1702-1710** Christoph Rosenmüller
- No. 7 • **From Many, One: Indians, Peasants, Borders, and Education in Callista Mexico, 1924-1935** Andrae Marak
- No. 8 • **Violence in Argentine Literature and Film (1989-2005)** Edited by Carolina Rocha and Elizabeth Montes Garcés
- No. 9 • **Latin American Cinemas: Local Views and Transnational Connections**
Edited by Nayibe Bermúdez Barrios

LATIN AMERICAN CINEMAS

Local
Views and
Transnational
Connections

Edited by
**NAYIBE
BERMÚDEZ
BARRIOS**



Calgary, Alberta : 2011.

MYTH AND THE MONSTER OF INTERSEX: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF OTHERNESS IN LUCÍA PUENZO'S *XXY*

Charlotte E. Gleghorn¹

Royal Holloway, University of London

The postdictatorship cultural climate in Argentina, as in many other Southern Cone countries, has been marked by an increased attention to the peripheral, forgotten characters of national history and their often unheard and unseen identities. This "attraction to society's marginal or abandoned figures, those who cast a dilemma about the representation of otherness" (Masiello, 4) is reflected in recent filmic production and epitomized in features such as *Pizza, birra, faso* [*Pizza, Beer and Cigarettes*] (Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro, 1998), *Mundo grúa* [*Crane World*] (Pablo Trapero, 1999), and *La ciénaga* [*The Swamp*] (Lucrecia Martel, 2001), all associated with the so-called *nuevo cine argentino* [New Argentine Cinema].² Indeed, if one thing could be said to unite a number of films under the label of New Argentine Cinema, it is, according to Gabriela Copertari, "that they all stage narratives of disintegration" (279).

The diversity of experience, themes of social concern and the absence of a *grand récit* dominate these recent films, highlighting the fracturing of a unified concept of history and contesting official versions of truth as they had formerly been presented.

Amongst the films produced over the last decade are countless meditations – in short films, documentaries and features – on the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976–83), of which *Los rubios* [*The Blondes*] (Albertina Carri, 2003) stands out for its avant-garde aesthetic and the polemic it caused. Notably, however, a number of films have also turned their eye to the theme of sexual diversity. Carri's third feature, *Géminis* [*Gemini*] (2005), considers an incestuous relationship in a bourgeois family; *Vagón fumador* [*Smoker's Only*] (Verónica Chen, 2001) and *Ronda nocturna* [*Night Watch*] (Edgardo Cozarinsky, 2005) both portray male prostitution on the streets of Buenos Aires; *Un año sin amor* [*A Year without Love*] (Anahí Berneri, 2004) brings AIDS and gay sadomasochism to the centre of its narrative; and *Tan de repente* [*Suddenly*] (Diego Lerman, 2002) reinvigorates the traditional road movie with a lesbian kidnapping. *XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007), the film discussed in this article, brings yet another narrative of diversity to the screen, that of an intersex adolescent.

XXY

Cited in the Argentine newspaper *Página 12* as “una de las películas más inquietantes que el cine argentino haya dado en bastante tiempo” [“one of the most disturbing films Argentine cinema has offered in a good while”] (Bernades), *XXY* has garnered a number of international awards and at the time of writing holds pride of place in countless GBLT film festivals around the world. This coproduction between Argentina, France, and Spain, won the Critics' Week Grand Prize at the 2007 Cannes festival and the 2008 Goya Award for best Spanish language film.³ Adapted from Sergio Bizzio's short story “Cinismo” [“Cynicism”], the film constitutes the director Lucía Puenzo's feature debut.⁴

XXY is the story of a fifteen-year-old girl, Alex (Inés Efron); an intersex adolescent struggling with her identity. Alex's parents, Suli (mother) and Kraken (father) – played by Valeria Bertuccelli and Ricardo Darín



FIG. 1. ALEX (INÉS EF-
RON) FLOATING
ON THE WATER.
FILM STILL FROM
XXY (COURTESY
HISTORIAS CINE-
MATOGRÁFICAS).

respectively – decided not to operate on her unexpected phallus when she was born, despite the encouragement of the doctors to normalize her female genitalia, and left Buenos Aires for Uruguay in search of a life away from the judgmental gaze of others. Now her mother invites a friend, Erika (Carolina Pelleritti), and her surgeon husband, Ramiro (Germán Palacios) from the Argentine capital to study Alex's case and evaluate the option of surgery to ‘correct’ Alex's body. The guests' son, Álvaro (Martín Piroyansky), develops a relationship with Alex, ultimately bringing the recognition of Alex's ambiguous body out into the open. The film concludes with the surgeon and his family returning to Buenos Aires and

Alex asserting her desire to break free from the world of secrecy which enshrouds her body.

In spite of the fact that the film's website and director repeatedly describe Alex, the protagonist, as an intersex adolescent, and not as a hermaphrodite, the majority of film criticism on the feature uses the mythic term of the hermaphrodite to denote Alex's status.⁵ This is problematic, not only for its denial of the more general and recent term, intersex, but also for locating the narrative in the realm of myth with which the hermaphrodite is commonly associated. This tension between myth and reality, otherness and normality, reflected in these critics' perspectives on the film, is also to be found at the centre of the film's narrative structure. In order to discuss the strategies by which Puenzo brings Alex's otherness to the fore, I will first briefly outline the history of the myth and scientific treatment of hermaphrodites, or intersex individuals, as they are now widely known.

INTERSEXUALITY

As Anne Fausto-Sterling states in her book, *Sexing the Body*, "Intersexuality is old news" (32). While the term has only emerged in recent years, the existence of mixed-sex people has been documented since Antiquity under the guise of the hermaphrodite.⁶ In classical Greek mythology, Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who seemingly fused with the body of a water nymph, Salmacis, forming a body half male, half female.⁷ The rejection of the term 'hermaphrodite' by members of activist groups, such as the Intersex Society of North America, was largely brought about to correct the inadequacy of the hermaphrodite model to describe a wide range of alternative configurations of the body, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a move away from the intense mythical status of the term.⁸ Indeed, a study of the hermaphrodite over time demonstrates its persistent association with the Greek myth, a body belonging to the realm of the fantastical: an other-worldly body. The changing attitudes to the figure of the hermaphrodite mirror the changes in European societies, which increasingly sought to categorise the human body. As Foucault documents in his introduction to *Herculine*

Barbin, "It was a very long time before the postulate that a hermaphrodite must have a sex – a single, a true sex – was formulated. For centuries it was quite simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two" (1980, vii). While not entirely devoid of stigmatization, the hermaphrodite did have certain rights and could, up to a point, enjoy its status as a Third Sex. As Gilbert Herdt notes in the volume *Third Sex, Third Gender*:

The Greeks and the early Romans seem to have shared in folk beliefs and practices that were more open in their epistemology of sexual nature and sexual culture. Their acceptance of sexual and gender variations emerged from fundamental sources: the variety of life forms and genders that Zeus could temporarily inhabit, at one time desiring a woman and later a boy; the significance of the god Hermaphroditus in Greek thought; the acceptance of the legendary Tiresias, who changed from male to female to male again in one lifetime, and whose soothsaying powers hark back to such pansexuality. All of these Greek forms showed a lively attention to anatomical differences and sexual options, but with much more fluidity permitted in states of being and ways of acting human. (13–14)

However, with the rise of scientific reason in the nineteenth century, biologists focused on further dissecting and categorizing the human body. The French zoologist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in the 1830s developed a science of unusual births, *teratology*, which began to work towards the subdivision of hermaphrodites into the categories of "true" and "pseudo" hermaphrodites.⁹ Moreover, the fusion of the two sexes became increasingly questioned during the nineteenth century, as it was assumed that one of them, male or female, would prevail, even in a hybrid body. Gradually the hermaphrodite became explained away to the point of societal obsolescence. The denial of the juxtaposition of the two sexes thus reinforced the binary sex system which marked male and female at opposing poles on a scale and obliterated their hybrid from the middle. Scientific advancement began to treat these "unusual" bodies not as freak phenomena but as disfigurements that could be "fixed" with the tools of science.

While today a growing number of accounts of intersex experience are coming to the fore in autobiographical narrations of embodiment and gender "normalization," it seems that little has changed since the nineteenth century with regard to the medical treatment of intersex individuals.¹⁰ Indeed, as Alice Dreger makes patently clear in her excellent account of hermaphroditism and its treatment over time, there exists a disjuncture between what she terms the contemporary "postmodernistic" life histories from the perspective of intersex individuals themselves and the "extremely modernistic" medical-technological approaches to these biological anomalies (181). These approaches are based on the underlying assumption that, unless a child is brought up firmly in accordance with the societal gender norms of his/her given culture, s/he will be confused and severely unstable.¹¹ In line with this belief, doctors generally seek to take action promptly after birth to ensure an effective adjustment.

At birth, intersex children are declared a social emergency. Typically the parents are given twenty-four hours to make a decision about whether to operate on the baby's body and are rarely allowed the opportunity to talk to other parents of intersex children to understand their options. However, today activist groups such as the aforementioned Intersex Society of North America demand that "normalization" surgery should be decided with the patient at a later stage, giving the person the opportunity to choose and live with his/her chosen bodily configuration.¹²

XXY questions the surgical and hormonal methods used to control intersex bodies and as such overlaps with concerns of activist groups who seek to protect the corporeal autonomy of these children until they are of an age to make a decision for themselves. The film both highlights the scientific and illegitimate "fixing" of intersex individuals and allows the protagonist Alex agency in decisions over what should happen with her "deviant" body. This article considers both the film's important attempt to inscribe the body of the intersex person in the visual realm and the concomitant reiteration of this same body as other-worldly through the use of the marine myth.

BORDERLANDS

Alex's body is contested in multiple ways, and its corporeality suggests a borderland that is neither male, nor female, neither heterosexual, nor homosexual. Indeed, the figure of the intersex adolescent recognizes the limitations of sexual dimorphism, acknowledging that there are other combinations of gender and sexuality which are, in fact, humanly possible. Alex's corporeality, then, is "caught up in cultural 'border wars' – wars over the borders separating males and females, men and women, boys and girls, borders separating the acceptable heterosexual and the disfavored homosexual, borders separating those with authority from those without" (Dreger, 198). This frontier is evoked not only through Alex's hybrid body but also through her environment.

The borderland in XXY is inscribed from the outset in the location of the narrative. Set near Piriápolis in Uruguay, the family lead a reclusive life away from the big city and are deeply involved with marine and beach life. The beach, as a physical border which separates land and sea, becomes the landscape which epitomizes Alex's in-between state, as we learn in the film that she was in fact conceived on the sand. Alex's parents' decision to return to the place where she was conceived, and thus escape the judgment of people in the city of Buenos Aires, indicates a return to the very origin of Alex located in this desolate beach landscape. Far from depicting a hot, sunny beach with scantily dressed holiday-makers, however, the beach where Alex's family live is wild, windy, and grey. Furthermore, Alex's tomboyish appearance emphasizes the refusal of the film to eroticize the beach location, as in place of the usual swimming costume or bikini, Alex appears in a hooded top and knee-length shorts. Thus, the remote coastal setting of the film highlights Alex's reclusion and stakes out her diversity in terms of dress code and modes of leisure. Far from becoming the liberating space which her parents had desired, Alex's existence in this small-town locality is overshadowed by the secret she maintains hidden under her clothes. This secret is guarded throughout much of the film, and the spectator gradually realizes the nature of Alex's body from hints which are given in the dialogue. Yet it is the cinematography which most forcefully underlines the other-worldly status of Alex, alluding to the myth of the sea monster and depicting Alex's marginality from the opening of the film.

SEA MONSTERS

While the myth of Hermaphroditus is not specifically referenced in the film, I suggest that another myth, that of the sea monster Kraken – announced by way of Alex's father's name – structures its narrative. The film's proximity to the sea gives rise to the marine monster motif that perforates the film's symbolism.¹³ The myth of the sea monster is invoked from the opening sequence when we see the protagonist Alex running breathlessly through a wood with a machete, intercut with the film credits depicting underwater scenes of pulsating squid-like creatures and subaquatic noises. This scene begins with a close-up of Alex's feet as she walks through the woods barefoot. As a largely gender indeterminate part of the body, the shot of the feet highlights the theme of Alex's bodily ambiguity from the onset. We then become aware that a girl, who turns out to be Alex's friend later in the film, is chasing her through the woods. But while this chasing game would purport to suggest innocent child's play, there seems to be a more malign spirit which encodes the spectator's first encounter with Alex. The sound of breathlessness emphasizes a sense of urgency and panic and this is interlaced with the underwater sounds of the credits. The cuts between the scene in the woods and the credits become shorter, giving the impression that someone else, or something else, is chasing Alex, and the sequence stops abruptly with a thud as Alex brings the knife down to the ground as if she has been dragged to the depths of the sea.¹⁴ Furthermore, immediately following the credit sequence we see the guests from Argentina arriving at the family home with Alex framed as a beast of the underworld as she hides below the house and gazes on the new arrivals through the floorboards. Here a shot-reverse-shot sequence of point-of-view shots from Alex's and Álvaro's perspectives introduces the meeting between the two adolescents that will prove pivotal to the development of the characters throughout the film. This sequence of gazes also points to the economy of vision that is integral to the unveiling of Alex's secret in the narrative, and to which I will turn later. The opening, then, serves to alert the spectator to the spectral presence of the underwater monster.

SPECIES

Alex's connection with the underwater world occurs time and again in the film, from the clownfish which she keeps in a tank in her bedroom, to the refuge she seeks in the water. The fish she keeps in the house are not just an indication of her and her family's love for the marine world, but they also bear a symbolic weight in that the clownfish is also a protandrous hermaphroditic species, mutating from male to female with maturity. Indeed, the decision to include these fish in the *mise-en-scène* as a sign of Alex's gender indeterminacy points to the overt use of symbolism to accentuate aspects of her character.¹⁵ On a formal level, then, Alex's clownfish suggest that she is interested in permeable and mutating identities akin to her own.

There is a further connection to the sea, however, in the character of her father, a marine biologist, who bears the name of Kraken. This naming strategy at once alerts the spectator to the myth of the marine monster in the film and to the special relationship that Alex holds with her father through their connection with the sea. In the film, Alex frequently assists Kraken with his work, not only pointing to her interest in the marine world but also providing narrative situations to make frequent suggestions of the similarities between the impulse to categorise animals and human beings. On a number of occasions, the dialogue refers to humans as species, deepening the connections between the biological imperative to catalogue living organisms and humans alike. One such example occurs early on in the film, when Alex witnesses her father's naming of a stray turtle as *hembra*, female, as he carries out his work in his "consultation room." Building on this initial parallel established between animals and Alex, her exposed position in the community is emphasized in another scene when an argument between Kraken and Alex's friend Vando's (Luciano Nóbile) father also invokes the notion of species in reference to Alex's otherness. Here Vando's father goads Kraken by saying, "hay demasiadas especies en extinción por acá" ["there are too many species in extinction around here"], making reference to Alex's vulnerable status in the community.

The references to species in light of Alex's condition are not, however, limited to other characters but are also reflected in Alex's own comments,

illustrating Alex's acute awareness of her alien position in society. In one scene Álvaro is playing with "un bichito raro" ["a strange bug"] on the beach when Alex confronts him with "¿qué sabés vos de las especies de mi casa?" ["what do *you* know about the species of my home?"], once again inferring that her world is a world-apart, another universe. The parallels established between the categorization of species in the animal world and in the world of humans once again emphasize the borderland that Alex inhabits – she belongs to both marine and human, male and female realms.

FUSION WITH THE SEA

Additional to the explicit references to Alex's otherness in the dialogue in the film, the cinematography (executed by Natasha Braier) frequently highlights and visualizes Alex's fusion with the marine world. In one scene we see Alex lying half-naked on her bed next to a huge window that gives directly onto the water, and the sound of the sea invades her private, and intimate, space. The structure of the shot visually emphasizes the absence of a barrier between her and the water; they literally become one.

The character of Alex, then, is to be found at the intersection of myth and reality through her straddling of human and animal realms. Her sexual otherness is underlined by way of the pet lizard she allows to roam her body. Indeed, the lizard, a colourful green reptile, is an extremely powerful evocation of otherness, a beast that often provokes fear, not fondness, in humans. Alex, by contrast, is at home with the lizard on her body and lets it crawl over her skin freely. This scene is erotically charged as the camera lingers on the skin-on-skin contact of the reptile with Alex, and the camera cuts to Alex's extremities as the lizard explores her body, highlighting the marrying of the image of a scaly beast with Alex's perceived dangerous sexuality. The camera here rests on the lizard as it slithers across Alex's skin, lending the scene more than a hint of sexual overtones.

Later on in the film, Alex's mother makes a point of returning, with the surgeon Ramiro and his wife, to the spot where Alex was conceived,

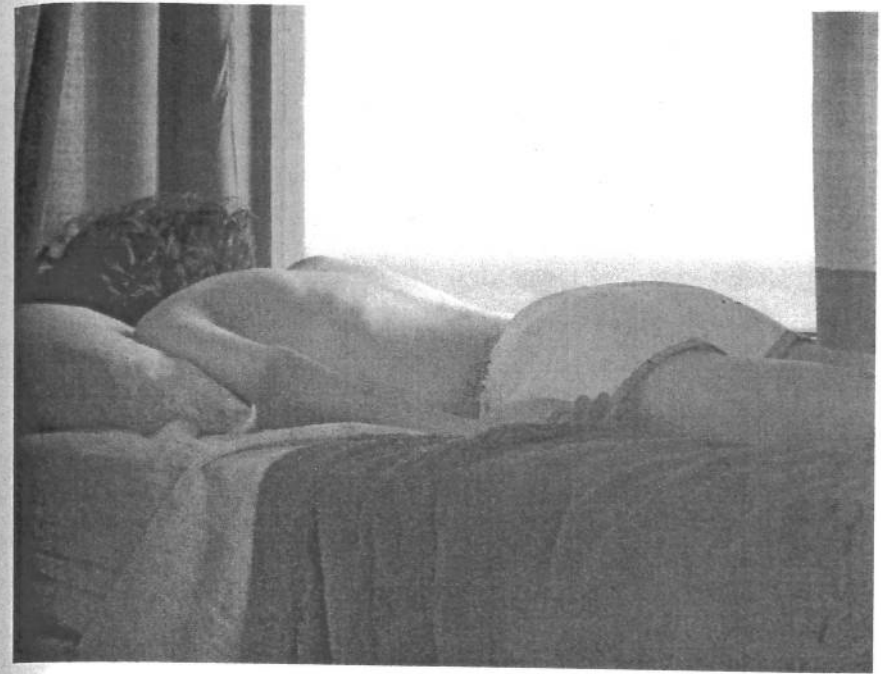


FIG. 2. ALEX (INÉS EFRON) LYING NAKED ON HER BED. PHOTO BY SEBASTIÁN PUENZO (COURTESY HISTORIAS CINEMATOGRAFICAS).

where she recounts the sexual encounter that resulted in Alex's birth. Given that the relationship between the three friends at this moment is fraught with tension as a result of the surgeon's fascination with Alex's body, it seems strange and certainly significant that Alex's mother should want to emphasize the exact location of her daughter's conception to the intruders in her family home. This serves to underline the fact that Alex's very existence is intimately linked to the coastal setting and the marine world on a number of levels.

Alex's other-worldly origins are further highlighted in a conversation that takes place between Kraken and the surgeon Ramiro. Here Kraken describes Alex's birth and remembers that she was *azul*, blue, when she was born. While Kraken, in the first instance, is actually referring to the fact that she could not breath for forty seconds, her apparent blueness

could also be interpreted as referencing Alex's alien and Other status.¹⁶ Kraken continues by saying: "Era perfecta. Desde el primer momento en que la vi, perfecta" ["She was perfect. From the very first moment I saw her, perfect"], evidencing his acceptance of her body in spite of its perceived irregularity. Moreover, Kraken's account of Alex as perfect at birth emphasizes his desire to classify her as a girl and the special father-daughter relationship that they hold.¹⁷ Yet this description also challenges society's judgment that Alex should not be perfect, but a monstrous body that needs to be rectified.

THE MONSTROUS FEMININE

The blueness that characterizes Alex's birth reoccurs throughout the film since her skin has an iridescent quality, emphasized by the grey and blue hues that mark the desolate landscape of the Uruguayan coast. Her skin, clothes, and eye colour all complement the blue tones of the sea, underlining her familiarity with the marine world. On one occasion, we see her seeking refuge in the sea following her sexual encounter with Álvaro, floating on the water's surface, as if at home there. Here the light is overexposed on her body, giving her skin a bright quality, and the tag around her neck, actually a tag used to trace turtles as they migrate, alludes to a monitored, alien identity. In this way the tag is representative of her belonging to the animal realm but also references a structure of control and monitoring.¹⁸ The tag, or identity number, is doubly encoded, emphasizing how Alex seamlessly bridges the human and aquatic kingdoms as she does the male/female divide. This duality, or hybridity, renders her body akin to the monstrous figures of the past.

The reference to the Kraken monster through the repeated marine motif and Alex's father's name is a signal that her intersex identity appears monstrous to members of society. Indeed, her physical hybridity radically questions the very fundamentals of the normative, heterosexual, and dualistic society in which many of us live.¹⁹ As Foucault reminds us in *Abnormal*:

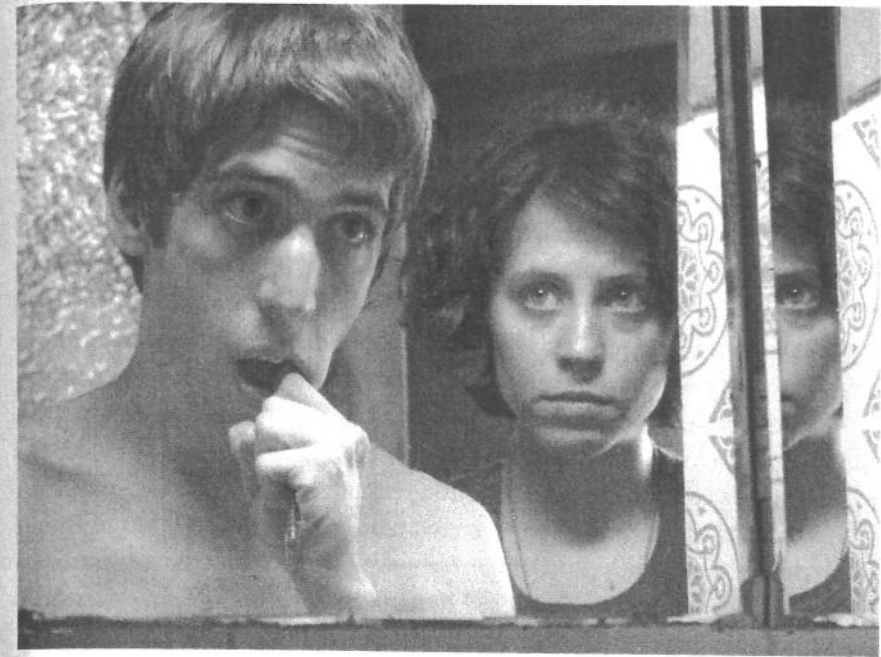


Fig. 3. ÁLVARO (MARTÍN PIROYANSKY) AND ALEX (INÉS EFRON) EXCHANGING GAZES IN THE MIRROR. PHOTO BY SEBASTIÁN PUENZO (COURTESY HISTORIAS CINEMATográficas).

The monster is essentially a mixture [...] of two realms, the animal and the human: the man with the head of an ox, the man with a bird's feet – monsters. It is the blending, the mixture of two species: the pig with a sheep's head is a monster. It is the mixture of two individuals: the person who has two heads and one body or two bodies and one head is a monster. It is the mixture of two sexes: the person who is both male and female is a monster. It is a mixture of life and death: the fetus born with a morphology that means it will not be able to live but that nonetheless survives for some minutes or days is a monster. Finally, it is a mixture of forms: the person who has neither arms nor legs, like a snake, is a monster (2003, 63).

The corporeal ambiguity and hybridity that surrounds Alex's existence is at the centre of her repression as she has persistently been taught that it is wrong to publicly acknowledge her "in-between state." Raised to be ashamed of her diversity, Alex is intensely aware of the labelling – evidenced through her wearing of the turtle identification tag – of her body as monstrous and the fascination that it provokes. At one point she even refers to herself as a monster in a discussion with Álvaro following their intimate sex scene: "Andá, decíles a todos que soy un monstruo" ["Go on, tell them all I'm a monster"]. In this way, the fascination with Alex's body as a phenomenon bears a striking resemblance to the fascination with the deformities of monsters.

In an essay on the cultural representation of monsters from Antiquity until Descartes, the Portuguese philosopher José Gil writes, "Os homens precisam de monstros para se tornarem humanos" ["Men need monsters to become humans"] (80). In other words, as a limit body, the figure of the monster represents a symbolic transgression of the norm and provides the marker by which all "normal" human beings should be understood. Unlike the monsters of which José Gil writes, however, our monster, Alex, does not flaunt her physical difference in public as a show of excess. Rather the act of seeing, looking at her body, in the film is codified as a violent and voyeuristic act, thus challenging the spectator to rethink the primacy of the visual in constructing notions of sex and gender identity. This is most clearly demonstrated in the lynching scene.

In this scene – which is extremely harsh and violent – Alex is attacked by a group of boys who want to know what lies beneath her clothes. Here we see the protagonist held down on a secluded beach and violated with the gaze of the boys, who pull her pants down to see if she really has a penis or not. While there is in fact no penetration – all the boys keep their shorts on – the scene is encoded as a gang rape whereby we see Alex completely stripped of the clothes that rendered the source of her difference invisible. Although Alex's diversity in the film is not only at the genital level, the suggestion is that vision, the very act of seeing and acknowledging the hybrid body physically, renders Alex powerless. Moreover, the boys who reveal her secret get a sexual kick out of seeing her mixed-sex genitalia, pointing to the power of the gaze in sexual interactions.

VOYEURISM AND VIOLENCE

Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) is instructive here in its analysis of voyeurism and scopophilia as integral to the architecture of cinema. According to Mulvey, "The place of the look defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from say, strip-tease, theatre, shows and so on. Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself" (46). Moreover, the gendered implications of Mulvey's seminal article point to the possibility of interpreting the monstrous in the context of XXY as a specifically feminine construct. Indeed, as Rosi Braidotti has emphatically demonstrated,

The monstrous as the negative pole, the pole of pejoration, is structurally analogous to the feminine as that which is other-than the established norm [...] Within this dualistic system, monsters are, just like bodily female subjects, a figure of devalued difference; as such, it provides the fuel for the production of normative discourse (80).

She continues:

Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of *fascination and horror*. This logic of attraction and repulsion is extremely significant. (81)

Thus, both Mulvey's and Braidotti's analysis of the power of the gaze and its fascination with the Other, the woman, highlights the film's strategic mobilization of the motif of the monster through the body of an intersex girl in order to interrogate the structure of voyeurism in cinema and suggest the violence of the look in its objectifying form. The decision to use a female actress to portray the intersex character is fundamental here in

the association of Alex with the female sex. While Alex presents a border body in her representation of an intersex adolescent, it is evident that the parents have brought her up as a girl from birth and that society expects her body to comply with this categorization. The actress Inés Efron provides a polished performance of the complexities of Alex's embodiment and identity, and her casting also reiterates the character's notional definition as a girl. This, in turn, emphasizes the connection I make between the logic of the monster and the economy of the gaze in cinema.

The implication that the spectator is bound up in the structure of voyeurism, which delineates the characters in their power relations in the film, highlights the role that the gaze, and the revealing or obscuring of Alex's body, plays in the film. Throughout *XXY* the spectator is almost "teased" by the idea that s/he will see the "offending" anatomy. While there are at least four key moments when Alex's genitals are revealed to other characters in the film (the sex scene; the shower scene with her friend; the lynching scene; and the goodbye scene between Alex and Álvaro), the spectator, in fact, never witnesses the physical secret. This withholding device also provides much of the tension in the film in that there is always an expectation that at some point the "truth" will be revealed, although the spectator does not know when or how.²⁰ *XXY* builds on the possibilities of voyeurism in cinema to emphasize the violent nature of the gaze, culminating in the violence of Alex's lynching and subsequent derobing, while ultimately refusing the spectator a role in that structure of power.

According to Gil, "ao exibir a sua deformidade, a sua anormalidade – que normalmente se esconde – o monstro oferece ao olhar mais do que qualquer outra coisa jamais vista. O monstro chega mesmo a viver dessa aberração que exhibe por todo o lado a fim de que a vejam" ["by exhibiting its deformity, its abnormality – which is normally hidden – the monster offers more to the eye than any other thing ever seen. The monster even manages to live off that very same aberration that it exhibits everywhere, for everyone to see"] (78). Herein lies the fundamental difference between the monsters of myth and the reality that is depicted in the film. Gil suggests that monsters actively expose their deformities, defying humans to see and acknowledge their difference. Alex, on the other hand, does not flaunt the visual signs of her otherness. Indeed, as has been observed by a number of critics who consider the concept of the

monster, the etymological origin of the word is closely related to the verb *mostrare*, the act of showing something publicly.²¹ Alex is thus rendered monstrous through the act of revealing her perceived deformity. In this sense, the lynching scene serves to demarcate the realm of monster from the real experience of an intersex adolescent.

HAUNTING HOMOSEXUALITY

Over the course of *XXY*, however, it becomes clear that there is a second otherness that haunts the film. The surgeon's son, Álvaro, is a withdrawn teenager, struggling with his identity and his relationship with his father. Following the sexual encounter between Álvaro and Alex, where Álvaro realizes that he enjoyed being penetrated by Alex, the theme of dangerous homosexuality also invades the narrative. As Fausto-Sterling argues: "The debates over intersexuality are inextricable from those over homosexuality; we cannot consider the challenges one poses to our gender system without considering the parallel challenge posed by the other" (112). Historically hermaphrodites were forced to choose a sex at adulthood and then stick by it for life in order to conform to the heterosexual matrix. Those individuals who chose to be considered male and then pursued relationships with men were considered homosexual and constituted a threat to the established social order. The imperative to denote a category for the human body at birth, either male or female, corresponds to society's anxieties surrounding homosexuality, perceived as a threat to the normative heterosexual matrix. Thus, the character of Álvaro supplies the narrative flipside of intersex identity. Álvaro's father, the surgeon, is concerned that his son may be gay, and Alex is unsure whether she likes men, women, or both. Alex's parents, on recognizing that their daughter used her phallus (which according to her diagnosis is, in fact, a long clitoris) to penetrate another male, express concern for her development, once again highlighting the interconnectedness of genital ambiguity to concerns of homosexual propensity. These anxieties over sexuality haunt the film and evidence that it is much more than Alex's genital sex at stake in society's perception of her intersexuality. The possibility that she could, on a physical level, pursue sexual relations with

both sexes constitutes a grave threat to society. This threat is illustrated in the repressive presence of the surgeon.

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH

XXY presents the malevolent forces that repress Alex as masculine institutions, here embodied in the character of the surgeon, Ramiro. Ramiro is constructed as a harsh and unsympathetic father who is distressed at the idea that his son may be gay. When Álvaro, upset after the lynching of Alex, confronts his father in a fireside heart-to-heart, Ramiro admits to being disappointed in him. In turn, Ramiro is relieved by the fact that Álvaro appears to have fallen for a girl, albeit an intersexual, as he informs his son "Tenía miedo de que fueras puto" ["I was scared that you were queer"]. This anxiety over his son's sexuality is evidenced earlier in the film when Ramiro obliges Álvaro to drink some wine over a family meal, suggesting that his son should put something strong into his veins. These examples of Ramiro's dissatisfaction in his own son, and reluctance to accept a non-hetero sexuality, however, do more than just illustrate his own narrow-mindedness. They explicitly reference this surgeon's fascination with abnormalities and his desire to correct bodies (and monsters). Ramiro's attempt to mould Álvaro into a *real* man by forcing him to drink alcohol finds a parallel in his desire to mould Alex's body in accordance with normative sex-gender expectations.

Ramiro's profession is perceived as sinister from his very arrival in the family house as Kraken takes visible offence at his being invited in the first place. His fascination with Alex's 'case' is written in the surgeon's leading questions but also in his very sexualized gaze on his potential patient. In a kitchen scene, Alex is observed by Ramiro in a point-of-view shot to which she responds with a question: "¿Te gusta abrir cuerpos?" ["Do you like to open bodies?"] Alex's astute remark and awareness of his gaze and profession is also referenced in a conversation between Alex and Álvaro in Kraken's workplace, when she asks her new friend "¿Fuiste alguna vez ... al quirófano a ver como rebana cuerpos?" ["Have you ever been ... to the operating theatre to see how he cuts up bodies?"], to which Álvaro replies "No rebana cuerpos, los arregla" ["He doesn't cut

up bodies, he fixes them"]. The use of the verb *rebanar*, literally to cut or to slice off a member/limb, and noun *quirófano* [operating theatre], harks back to the practice of violent repression during the Argentine Dirty War when the repressors used overtly medical vocabulary to refer to a range of torture practices.²² The allusion made between the victim of torture and the patient at the end of the scalpel is relevant here inasmuch as it demonizes the institution of medicine for its corrective tendencies and failure to consult the patients first. Many victims of intersex normalization surgery are damaged in their potential to fully function in the genital area, making it difficult to urinate and enjoy sex. The striking resonances between the attempt to cut away the cancer of society in the "operating theatres" in the dictatorship era – in the case of the Junta's rhetoric the cancers were *los subversivos* [the subversives] – and the efforts to cut away the offending piece of anatomy in the intersex body point to the overtly repressive and dehumanizing treatment of individuals that continues in contemporary society.

RESISTANCE AND HOPE

For all the repressive and controlling techniques used on Alex's body, the protagonist and her family actually present relatively positive approaches to intersex life. Alex's condition, congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), is essentially a hormonal and enzyme irregularity, which in severe cases may cause genital ambiguity.²³ The virilization of CAH children, which normally occurs in adolescence, is usually controlled by hormone therapy, but in the film we see Alex refuse to take her medicine and throw the pills away. This is clearly expressed in the scene that takes place between Alex and her mother, when the former throws away her pills unequivocally stating "Quiero que todo siga igual" ["I want everything to stay the same"]. Moreover, Alex confronts the silence that enshrouds her body towards the end of the film when Kraken refers to the possibility of reporting the lynching incident: "Si querés, la hacemos, pero es tu decisión" ["If you want, we can go ahead with it but it's your decision"]. He then goes on to lament "se va a enterar todo el mundo" ["Everyone is going to find out"], to which Alex defiantly retorts "que se enteren" ["Let them"].

Ultimately Alex is not entirely sure of what she expects and hopes of the future, but for the time being, she wants to relieve herself of the burden of the secret and be able to acknowledge her ambiguous body publicly. Thus, her recognition of her body, and refusal of surgery and hormone therapy, constitute a rejection of the institution of medicine to "correct" these unruly bodies.

By rejecting these disciplining forces, Alex's body essentially questions the rigid gender and sex categories to which we have become so accustomed. Her body represents a more flexible interpretation of the tensions between sex, gender, and sexuality and as such defies control. Moreover, she is doubly unruly in the sense that she wishes neither to define her body as a stable entity nor to behave according to heterosexual gender norms – she penetrates Álvaro in the sex scene. This fluidity is precisely what threatens to disrupt notions of sexual diversity.

XXY negotiates the cultural malaise that the intersex body provokes through the trope of the monster, thus underlining Alex's otherness in a society that seeks to monitor discrete categories of sex and gender. Alex's decision that everything should stay the same defies the secrecy that has characterized her childhood and proposes that she might lead a full life with whichever embodied identity she chooses. Alex's body suggests that it is possible to envision an approximation of scientific knowledge and social constructionism and write the body's physical corporeality back into questions of gender. Alex's body, then, is a limit body. Presented as Other-worldly through its association with the marine myth, Alex becomes Other-worldly in an alternative sense. Alex's body belongs to a "postgender" world beyond the dualistic confines of the nature/nurture divide.²⁴

The tensions inherent in the film's use of the gaze and encoding of Alex as Other by way of pre-existing tropes of difference as expressed in the figure of the monster (Hermaphroditus, Kraken and woman) echo Dreger's comments on the contemporary friction between modernistic and postmodernistic approaches to intersexuality. By shedding light on what Dreger defines as the modernistic treatment of intersex individuals, the film actively contributes to the development of "marginal" narratives associated with postmodern and postdictatorship cultural production in Argentina and recycles the motif of the monster in order to make social comment on the abuses committed against these invisible

bodies.²⁵ Moreover, XXY's underlying critique of the voyeuristic gaze of difference may be seen as representative of a number of Argentine films which, in a self-reflexive fashion, make reference to the camera as weapon. *Buenos Aires viceversa* (Alejandro Agresti, 1996) signals the camera as an "instrument of a voyeurism that is ethically not so distinguishable from the act of violence itself" (Page, 393). More recently, Albertina Carri wonders in *Los rubios* (2003), "¿en qué se parece una cámara a una picana?" ["How is a camera like an electric prod?"]. The critic David Oubiña, in an article considering the "omnipresence of politics" in recent Argentine films (Oubiña 2004), also highlights both the overlapping of social concerns with cinematic form and, significantly, reiterates the famous Benjaminian analogy between the surgeon and the cameraman from the seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production" (Benjamin 1936). XXY's narrative visualizes this same analogy, pointing to the similarities between the violence of the surgeon's gaze on the intersex body and the curious gaze elicited through the framework of voyeurism in cinema. However, by way of its self-reflexive reassessment of the gaze of difference in cinema, XXY suggests that in recognizing difference, the post- of postgender is not only possible but is already a reality for many, dislocating the myth from reality once and for all.

WORKS CITED

- Amado, Ana. 2003. Cine argentino: cuando todo es márgen. *El ojo que piensa*, no. 0 (August), http://www.eloquepiensa.udg.mx/espanol/numero00/very-ana/06_cineargentino.html (accessed July 20, 2008).
- Avelar, Idelber. 1999. *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1936. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm> (accessed August 16, 2008).
- Bernades, Horacio. 2007. El saludable arte de plantear preguntas. *Página 12*, June 14, <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/5-6638-2007-06-14.html> (accessed May 12, 2008).
- Braidotti, Rosi. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- . 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge.
- Copertari, Gabriela. 2005. *Nine Queens: A Dark Day of Simulation and Justice*. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3: 279–93.
- Dreger, Alice. 1998. *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Falicov, Tamara. 2007. *The Cinematic Tango: Contemporary Argentine Film*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2000. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Feitlowitz, Marguerite. 1998. *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. Les insensés. Chap. 5 in *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique suivi de mon corps, ce papier, ce feu et la folie, l'absence d'œuvre*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1980. Introduction to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall, vii–xii. New York: Pantheon Books.
- . 2003. Lecture, January 22, 1975. In *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, 55–79. London: Verso.
- Gil, José. 2006. *Monstros*. Lisbon: Relógio D'Água Editores.
- Gundermann, Christian. 2005. The Stark Gaze of the New Argentine Cinema: Restoring Strangeness to the Object in the Perverse Age of Commodity Fetishism. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3: 241–61.
- Herd, Gilbert. 1994. *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*. New York: Zone Books.
- Hesler, John. 2004. Intersexes and the End of Gender: Corporeal Ethics and Postgender Bodies. *Journal of Gender Studies* 13, no. 3: 215–25.
- Kessler, Suzanne. 1998. *Lessons from the Intersexed*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Masiello, Francine. 2001. *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mulvey, Laura. 2000. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. In *Feminism and Film*. Ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 34–47. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Originally published *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975).]

Oubiña, David. 2004. Between Break Up and Tradition: Recent Argentinean Cinema. *Senses of Cinema* no. 31 (April–June), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/31/recent_argentinean_cinema.html (accessed August 12, 2008).

Page, Joanna. 2001. Postmodernism, History and Social Critique in Post-Dictatorship Argentine Cinema: A Reading of Eliseo Subiela's *El lado oscuro del corazón*. *Modern Language Review* 96, no. 2: 385–96.

FILMS

- Un año sin amor* [*A Year without Love*]. Directed by Anahí Berneri. Distribution Company, 2004.
- Buenos Aires viceversa*. Directed by Alejandro Agresti. Argentina Video Home, 1996.
- The Crying Game*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Miramax Films, 1992.
- La fe del volcán* [*Faith of the Volcano*]. Directed by Ana Poliak. Cinemagroup, 2001.
- Géminis* [*Gemini*]. Directed by Albertina Carri. Distribution Company, 2004.
- Mundo grúa* [*Crane World*]. Directed by Pablo Trapero. Facets Multimedia Distribution, 1999.
- The Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. Directed by Gore Verbinsky. Buena Vista International, 2006.
- Pizza, birra, faso* [*Pizza, Beer and Cigarettes*]. Directed by Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro. Filmfreak Distributie, 1998.
- Ronda nocturna* [*Night Watch*]. Directed by Edgardo Cozarinsky. Cine Ojo, 2005.
- Los rubios* [*The Blondes*]. Directed by Albertina Carri. Women Make Movies, 2003.
- Tan de repente* [*Suddenly*]. Directed by Diego Lermán. Alfa Films, 2002.
- Vagón fumador* [*Smoker's Only*]. Directed by Verónica Chen. Strand Releasing, 2001.
- XXY*. Directed by Lucía Puenzo. Distribution Company, 2007.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to express my sincere thanks to the director Lucia Puenzo for her insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this essay.
- 2 The concept of New Argentine Cinema has been widely discussed and disputed in both journalism and the academic sphere. While the mid-1990s certainly presented a revival in film production in the country, heralded by the emergence of Martín Rejtman's film *Rapado* (1992), the aesthetic and themes deployed by directors are extremely varied and could not easily conform to the tenets of a filmic movement *per se*. Amongst others, Amado (2003) and Gundermann (2005) both acknowledge that the term is as much a marketing strategy as an aesthetic category and although an interest in the marginal characters of Argentina surfaces in many recent films, they are not all produced in the same manner. I would have to concur with the aforementioned critics in that the New Argentine Cinema generally describes an umbrella movement for extremely diverse production qualities and techniques. For an account of the tensions between state assisted film development and production during the 1990s, see Falicov.
- 3 It is interesting to note that while XXY was praised by Argentine and international critics alike, and selected to represent the country in the 2008 Academy Awards, the film was not finally shortlisted in the Best Foreign Film competition.
- 4 Additional to his role as writer of a number of films, Sergio Bizzio directed *Animalada* (2001). Lucía Puenzo, also a writer, is the daughter of the renowned director Luís Puenzo, responsible for *La historia oficial* [*The Official Story*] (1985), winner of Best Foreign Film Oscar at the 1986 Academy Awards.
- 5 For just a few examples of the description of Alex as a hermaphrodite, see the reviews and synopses at: <http://www.imdb.com>; <http://www.variety.com>; <http://www.siff.net> (the Seattle International Film Festival website). The website of the film is available at: <http://www.xxylapelicula.puenzo.com>.
- 6 The term "intersexuality" was purportedly coined by the biomedical researcher Richard Goldschmidt in 1917.
- 7 The myth of the origin of Hermaphroditus is documented in Book IV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is repeatedly discussed in scholarly works dedicated to the theme of hermaphroditism and intersexuality. See Dreger, 31.
- 8 Dreger writes of the difference between the two terms: "'Intersexed' literally means that an individual is between the sexes – that s/he slips between and blends maleness and femaleness. By contrast the term, 'hermaphroditic' implies that a person has both male and female attributes, that s/he is not a third sex or a blended sex, but instead that s/he is a sort of double sex, that is, in possession of a body which juxtaposes essentially 'male' and essentially 'female' parts" (31).
- 9 See Herdt and Fausto-Sterling for detailed discussions of the development of scientific approaches to intersexuality.
- 10 See Dreger, 173–80, for an introduction to first-person experience of being intersex.
- 11 See Kessler, 14–16 and her account of John Money's research, which has led to these assumptions.
- 12 The Intersex Society of North America was established by the prominent intersex woman Cheryl Chase. In the UK, the AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome) Support Network, created in 1988, coordinates help for varied conditions leading to intersexuality. See the group's website: <http://www.aissg.org>, for further information.
- 13 The Kraken myth derives from Norse mythology, closely related to the word *krake*, which means an unhealthy or twisted animal, but is in fact now thought to be the true account of a giant squid which terrorized sailors in Scandinavian waters centuries ago. The Kraken monster has also been used in literature and film, most famously in Alfred Tennyson's poem, 'The Kraken,' published in 1830. John Wyndham also wrote the novel *The Kraken Wakes* (1953) and more recently the Kraken appeared as the sea monster in the second part of *Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead Man's Chest* (Gore Verbinsky, 2006).
- 14 Given the subject of the film, it would also be possible to interpret a Freudian gesture here in that Alex attempts to 'cut away' that element of her genitalia that might be displeasing to her – her phallus.
- 15 This prevalent use of symbolic short cuts to communicate Alex's hybridity is one aspect of the film that has elicited criticism. See Bernades.
- 16 Kraken states: "Alex nació azul, tardó 40 segundos en respirar" [Alex was blue at birth, she took 40 seconds to start breathing].
- 17 Kraken's recounting of his designating Alex as a girl at birth is reminiscent of Judith Butler's analysis of the performative function of the phrase "It's a girl!" in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler returns to this notion of the effect of this performative iteration at the birth scene in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) when she writes, "To the extent that the naming of the 'girl' is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain 'girling' is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm" (232). As Kraken reminds us later in the film when he states "no va a ser mujer toda la vida" [she will never be a woman], Alex's corporeality is persistently discordant with what is normally expected of her.
- 18 This method of controlling and tracking individual identities bears a striking comparison with the identification number given to the character of Ana in another Argentine film, *La fe del volcán* [*Faith of the Volcano*] (Ana Poliak, 2001), and the numbers prisoners are given in concentration camps and detention centres. This method of monitoring and dehumanizing identities, then, is a recurrent motif of many films and may be attributed to the surveillance society which neoliberalism endorses.
- 19 It is worth noting that a number of anthropological and historical studies have also considered non-Western practices of conceiving of gender roles, sexuality, and intersexuality. See Gilbert Herdt, "Mistaken Sex: Culture, Biology and the Third Sex in New Guinea," in *Third Sex, Third Gender*, 419–46, and Will Roscoe, "How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity," in *Third*

Sex, Third Gender, 329–72, for two in-depth studies of these indigenous approaches to gender.

- 20 This same narrative strategy was exploited in the British film *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992), which toyed with Dil's bodily secret throughout. *XXY* differs from *The Crying Game*, however, in that the genitalia are never actually revealed to the camera's lens.
- 21 See Braidotti, 91; Foucault (1972), 162.
- 22 See Feitlowitz, for a thorough examination of the impact of the vocabulary used during the last dictatorship.
- 23 It is worth noting that the *XXY* condition of the title of the film is, in matter of fact, different than the condition that characterizes Alex. *XXY* (47) is a condition called Klinefelter's syndrome when several X chromosomes mix with one Y chromosome, potentially causing genital ambiguity. This leads me to believe that the title was used as a signifier to communicate the mixed-sex thematic of the narrative. Not surprisingly, however, the disjuncture between the title of film and Alex's actual condition has led some groups to criticize the film for ill-portraying the complexities of the various conditions. The Italian organization UNITASK (Italian Association for Klinefelter's syndrome) is one of the organizations that criticized Puenzo's film for misrepresentation. See <http://www.centrotecnomed.it/articolopetizione.htm> (accessed August 18, 2008). Also see Dreger, 35–40, for a breakdown of the specifics of different intersex conditions.
- 24 See Hester, for an analysis of the impact of the intersexual on the development of postgender thought.

- 25 Much debate has taken place regarding the specificities of the postmodern beyond the global North, particularly in terms of the judgment that a postmodern aesthetic precludes any possibility of social critique and evacuates any sense of the historical from cultural representation (Page 2001). Given postmodernity's intense association with the politics of late capitalism as a global phenomenon, it is important to note that the dictatorship in Argentina in many ways ushered in the subsequent and extremely severe 'opening up' and privatization of the economy that took place under President Menem's administration (1989–99). In this light, the postdictatorship years become, by extension, the embodiment of the postmodern logic *par excellence*. Indeed, for many critics, namely Idelber Avelar, the postdictatorship period is coterminous with postmodernity (Avelar, 79).

WATCHING RAPE IN MEXICAN CINEMA

Isabel Arredondo

State University of New York

In *From Reverence to Rape* (1974), one of the first works to examine rape in film, Molly Haskell describes how rape has been equated with romance. Since then, much more has been written about rape in the cinema. Sarah Projansky in particular has worked with the topic, first in her dissertation *Working on Feminism; Watching Rape* (1995), and later in the article "The Elusive/Ubiquitous Representation of Rape" (2001) and the book *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (2001). Inspired by Projansky's work, I have set out to examine representations of rape in Mexican film. As Projansky does, I restrict my analysis to films in which rape is represented as violation. Unlike Projansky's work, which builds a complete history of representations of rape in the history of U.S. film, my project is limited to analyzing key moments in the representation of rape in Mexican cinema. While Projansky is interested in demonstrating the pervasive and unacknowledged recurrence of rape in U.S. film and television, this article uses a historicized feminist perspective to focus on films by three renowned women filmmakers: Matilde Landeta, Marisa Sistach, and María Novaro.